

Colour through a transparent rubber sole: the second in what Anthony Miles says will be an ongoing series of revolutionary sole developments. CREDIT: ANTHONY MILES



Footwear entrepreneurs refuse to wait for economic woes to lift

Perhaps, in an environment in which comments from sour-faced bankers, politicians, economists and broadcasters tend to have such a depressing tone, it's no bad thing for the heart to rule the head every now and then. Footwear companies are never short of new concepts, but in the first half of 2013, so many interesting ideas seem to have come from footwear people in various countries that, even in this economy, there is no denying that the spirit of creativity and entrepreneurship that has always been part of the world of shoes is still alive and well.

Some shoe brands have decided that, in spite of the economic climate, now is the time to reach out into the wider

Even in this economy, new footwear business ideas keep coming to light. Then again, if you have the skill, the knowledge, the passion and the creativity, why hold back?

global market. Shlomi Bisa, for example, is the designer at a Tel Aviv-based brand called B.Unique. He seems too young to have done so, but insists he has been running, for ten years

now, the company his father founded. It's time to look outside, he says, because B.Unique cannot sell any more shoes in Israel. "It's a small country," he explains, "and we already work with ten boutique stores. They want some exclusivity, so we can't really sell to more stockists."

Some customers or agents are already in place in Belgium, Russia, France, Canada, Denmark, the US and Germany, mostly ordering small volumes, but he is optimistic he can build on this, in terms both of the size and the spread of the orders.

Bespoke manufacturer launches new fashion brand

B.Unique is an existing brand that wants to grow, but one completely new brand of luxury handmade men's shoes to have appeared in 2013 is Govan Originals, which made its debut at Pitti Uomo in Florence and Micam in Milan in the early part of the year. Co-founder Kevin Sefton wanted to call the brand Govan Originals partly because he wanted the quality of the craftsmanship, design and materials going into the shoes to reflect the ship-building traditions of Govan, an industrial district on Glasgow's southside. Selected styles in the debut collection feature a triangle stitching design to represent the bow of a ship, he explains, and some of the heel shapes he has chosen remind him of "a bow breaking a wave".

Govan is already home to one luxury shoe company, Buchanan Bespoke Footwear, and Buchanan managing director, Diana Currie, is Mr Sefton's co-founder for the new venture. She says diversification will be good for the company and good for footwear artisans who work there. "We have 30 people making shoes at the moment," she explains, "which is a lot for Scotland, and we are looking for more, including apprentices. Our apprentices have had to do private tuition with retired lecturers on aspects of production such as pattern-cutting. My feeling is that students today are learning a lot about shoe design, but not so much about how to transform an idea into something you can put on a last and, eventually, on a customer's foot, the hands-on aspects, so to speak. The workforce has loved making the first Govan Originals collection. We've always done bespoke shoes, but we have enjoyed seeing some fashion shoes come through too."

She explains that Govan Originals will be Buchanan's own fashion brand. Both strands of the company will operate entirely separately; Buchanan will continue to offer its bespoke service to customers, while Govan Originals, still



Pedro Monge's first own-brand store opened in Palma de Mallorca in April.

CREDIT: MONGE

handmade, just not made to measure, will bring Diana Currie's and Kevin Sefton's own fashion ideas to a wider market. "We wanted to offer something different from what we have made before," Ms Currie explains, "something different, something from Scotland, but with quirkiness and individuality. Our lasts are well shaped and fashionable, but not too extreme and we want to use as much local material as we can, blending the calf leather we use in the uppers with Scottish deerskin, cashmere and tweed. The opportunity was there and we have the skills, the knowledge and the passion, so we decided to go for it."

Island life

A similar spirit seems to have moved Mallorca-based Pedro Monge, who opened his own showroom in Palma in April. Mr Monge was an executive at one of Mallorca's most famous footwear brands, Camper, for seven years until 2010, developing a high level of knowledge of, and deep love for, leather and footwear. He left to do a business management course at university in Madrid and returned to Mallorca immediately afterwards to launch a brand of his own, Monge.

Concentrating almost exclusively on men's shoes, he comes up with his own designs and commissions traditional artisan footwear makers in other parts of the island to make the products to his specification. It's a very local form of outsourcing.

His styles are "classic with a twist", most obviously in the colours he uses, leading to shoes such as traditionally shaped Oxford dress shoes in pale pink or quince yellow leather. Monge shoes have been available online for some time, but the designer waited until April 2013 before opening his own showroom, picking a somewhat down-at-heel address in Mallorca's capital, the Plaça del Banc de l'Oli, so-named because in medieval times it was where olive-growers came to measure out and sell their oil.



The Lyle Oxford, one of the first Govan Originals shoes. The triangle stitching design on the toe represents the bow of a ship.

CREDIT: GOVAN ORIGINALS

"I've always liked this square," Mr Monge recently told local media. "I know it has a bit of a bad reputation but I have a feeling it will soon become very fashionable. I've liked it since I first set eyes on it, when I first came to Mallorca all those years ago." Pedro Monge is originally from Castile, but insists Mallorca is the only place for him to work because of the high level of artisan footwear manufacturing skills available to him on the island, in places such as Inca. "My task is to find these skilled artisans and give them new life," he says. "Mallorca has amazing artisans, and a lot of them are still going strong. It's a set-up that allows me to offer an original product with real craftsmanship built in."

Cry freedom

Another new brand to have come out of an established European centre of footwear production is Clandestino, which Porto-based designer Filipe Matos launched last year, placing some of his first products in stores run by Eureka Shoes, and launching formally at the end of March 2013.

Like Mr Monge, Clandestino founder Filipe Matos had been working for other companies since about 2003, but is now very ambitious about launching out on his own. The centrepieces of his collections so far are, for men, a range of low-cut baseball-boot styles called Plim, so called because they have plimsoll-type soles. There is a black canvas version and leather versions in blue, cognac and white, with additional green and cognac variations that have four on-trend monk-strap fastenings instead of laces and a zip. A leather-soled boot, the Clan, is also available in green, blue and cognac. For women, Clandestino shoes are in

a classic mary-jane style and are available in the same three colours so far—blue, cognac and green.

Mr Matos did part of his training in Milan, but remains committed to Portugal. His manufacturing partners are there and he will continue to have all his products made there. But that's not to say he will spend all his time there himself. "I want to produce the shoes in Portugal but would like some of the creativity to come from different places," he says. "So I have decided to spend time in Dubai later in 2013, then in Japan in 2014, then in Mexico in 2015. I want to be influenced by the lifestyle in these different places and by the materials I can find there."

Interesting touches he is already incorporating into his designs include a diagonal line through the letter 'o' in Clandestino. Each of the Plim boots has a diagonal strip of leather stitched onto the outersole, near the toe, to replicate this line. It represents the end of the shaft of a feather, the brand's symbol. The whole of the feather appears on the leather soles of the Clan and mary-jane styles, with, distinctively, some of the barbs from the tip flying loose as though blown by the wind. "It symbolises freedom," Filipe Matos says. "I want to feel that freedom."

A blast from the past

Cologne-based Markus Stolla is living proof that this desire for freedom and individuality is even alive and well in the world of football boots, so carefully controlled these days by massive sports brands that pay prominent players huge sums to wear the new models their design teams dream up. Recent

Free as the wind. A wind-blown feather is the symbol for new Portuguese brand Clandestino. CREDIT: CLANDESTINO





Markus Stolla (right) launches his RetroStar brand of traditional-style football boots at GDS in March.

CREDIT: GDS/CONSTANCE TILLMANN

results include the prototype evoSPEED 1.2 boots from Puma, designed to enhance a player's speed, but with "a bold camo print that gets you noticed on the pitch" too. In the case of this particular dreamy design, the "bold camo" print involves different-sized dots in three shades of pink (sachet pink, virtual pink and hot coral) on a white upper. For Markus Stolla, such ostentation is more a nightmare than a dream.

Tellingly, he has called his company RetroStar and, through an outsource partner in northern Italy, is expressing his taste and individuality by making a single style of retro boot in black, brown and cream. "My manufacturing partner in Italy is a very experienced maker of football boots," Mr Stolla says. "He's made millions of boots. In fact, when I showed him my designs, he told me that he remembered making this style of boot the first time around." That was in the late 1970s and early 1980s because the RetroStar style is based on the original Copa Mundial, the boot adidas brought out for the 1982 FIFA World Cup in Spain.

Take away the trademark adidas stripes, and the look is even more retro, although sleek and handsome, as handmade calfskin Italian footwear should be. A former television executive and semi-professional footballer himself, Markus Stolla says he firmly believes he will attract some high-profile professional players as customers in the near future. "Look, I don't want to be completely commercial about this," he insists. "It's for people who have style, who love understatement. Clearly, there are professional footballers who come into that category. Stefan Reisinger, a striker at Fortuna Düsseldorf, is one of them, and he is an admirer of RetroStar, although he is tied into a commercial contract at the moment."

Joy in the sole

Unlike RetroStar, but like Govan Originals, a new Leicester-based brand, Anthony Miles, has come out of an existing footwear manufacturing company although in this case it's a company, Kirby Footwear, that makes its collections offshore as own-brand shoes for big retail brand customers. Anthony Miles will be a brand in its own right.

Brand manager, Rob Wood, explains that the idea behind Anthony Miles is to take classic patterns and try to reinvent



Black boots with black trims. RetroStar's reworking of the classic adidas Copa Mundial boot from 1979 is a far cry from the multi-coloured boots many football stars wear today.

CREDIT: RETROSTAR

them. For example, a line of classic-looking wing-tip Oxford lace-ups, the Fosse style, use interesting angled lines for the decorative perforations on the main body of the shoe.

Most obviously of all, the shoes in the initial Anthony Miles collections come with brightly coloured soles, so that a classic black moccasin has slices of black and pink on the sole, and lots of combinations are possible. These pop-colour soles are made in three sections using slices of different coloured rubber, milled into just the right shape. "We are keeping the identity of the designer behind these ideas a secret for now," Mr Wood says. He goes on to say that the brand's debut collection for autumn-winter 2012-2013 had a strong start at Selfridge's in London. Spring-summer 2013 and autumn-winter 2013-2014 are, or will be, available at the London department store again, as well as at El Corte Inglés in Spain, Top Shop and online through Zalando and Asos.

"The work we have been doing for years at Kirby Footwear has been a big help," Rob Wood continues. "We have a wholly owned factory in China, with highly skilled technicians, including some from Brazil, working in it. We also had good experience and good contacts with buyers, which meant we knew the people to contact in the industry to get the shoes into the right stores. We're going to keep doing that and have already been in touch with some good contacts in Japan and Canada. We're also hoping for a breakthrough in the US market and we'd like to have a couple more high-end stores in the UK too."

Reaction to the three-piece sole in the inaugural collection was positive, leading to a determination at Anthony Miles to have something revolutionary in its soles in all subsequent collections. So as a follow-up, it has developed the idea of having pop colours show through a transparent rubber sole with, as a result, a shoe such as a classic-looking brown Fosse with a sole that looks translucent pink.

The flow of fresh ideas in the footwear industry is unending. 🌀

FOOTNOTE: Most of the information in this article came from interviews carried out by World Footwear at the Micam and GDS exhibitions in March 2013.